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*Ayars, Matt, Christopher T. Bounds, and Caleb T. Friedeman. Holiness: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Theology. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2023.*

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Three authors have collaborated to author this tome. Matt Ayars (PhD, St. John's College of Nottingham) is the former president and assistant professor of Old Testament of Wesley Biblical Seminary. The second author, Christopher T. Bounds, holds a PhD from Drew University and is a professor of theology at Asbury Theological Seminary. Caleb T. Friedeman (PhD, Wheaton College) serves as the David A. Case Chair of Biblical Studies and associate professor of New Testament at Ohio Christian University. The co-authors have several books and academic articles to their credit.

The authors write admittedly from the Wesleyan persuasion (2), a book that was initially a project of Francis Asbury Press, a publisher dedicated to the Wesleyan message. However, the co-authors recognised the benefits of securing a publisher with a 'wider reach' and eventually landed with IVP Academic ([ix]).

*Holiness: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Theology* is divided into four parts. Dr Ayars is the principal author of part one on the theology of holiness in the Old Testament. Dr Friedeman authored part two, which deals with holiness in the New Testament. Part three on the doctrine of holiness in the history of Christian thought and 'Part Four: "May the God of Peace Sanctify You Entirely": A Theology of Holiness' have been written by Dr Bounds.

In the introduction, the authors establish the agenda for their work, that is to develop 'a neo-holiness "middle-way"' (3), which the authors hold 'to be the most biblically faithful and theological consistent version' (3) of the doctrine of entire sanctification. The authors' position locates itself between the 'longer way' of reaching Christian perfection through a long process of continual spiritual growth and the 'shorter way' of attaining Christian perfection instantaneously through self-consecration and faith (4). The authors describe the 'middle way' as 'Christian perfection by seeking until you receive' (4).

Part One, "'Be Holy Because I am Holy": Holiness in the Old Testament', contains three chapters. The first, 'Holiness in the Pentateuch', emphasises the 'otherness of God' and the motifs of the divine task of 'forming' and the divine/human task of 'filling' motifs of the Genesis account, including humanity's vocation 'to multiply and fill the cosmos with his [God's] shalom light' (10) since the 'revelatory presence' of God does not yet fill the earth (11) because the divine image-bearing humans do not yet manifest his glory in all creation. The story of the fall of humanity recounts 'humanity's abdication of its image-bearing vocation' (16). Genesis further describes the effects of the fall, but the whole story turns on God's covenant with Abraham as God forms a new humanity in Abraham's family. Ayars summarises, 'In short, God's shalom will return to the creation through Abraham's family' (19). In Exodus, 'the new humanity – emerges out of the chaos of Egypt by way of the Red Sea, and the tabernacle is constructed as the microcosm of the new creation' (21). The giving of the commandments underscores the role of

the new humanity in ‘bringing life and order – and subsequently God’s glory – to the creation’ (26). The tabernacle raises the ‘forming and filling’ motif again as a ‘microcosm of the creation’ as the special place of the divine presence (27). Leviticus raises the barrier to divine-human fellowship against sinful humans in the oft-repeated phrase ‘be holy for I am holy’ and ‘explains how God can sanctify people and things’ through the sacrificial system (28). Numbers chronicles God’s faithfulness (*hesed*), whose presence continues with the unfaithful, stubborn Israelites whose ‘faithfulness is still required for the success of God’s redemption plan’ despite their election (36). In Deuteronomy, Moses encourages the Israelites to remain faithful to the covenant stipulations and to reflect the devotion depicted in the Shema (Deut. 6:4) to become God’s intended image-bearers.

Chapter 2 explores the theology of holiness as reflected in the historical books and the prophets. The historical books demonstrate God’s lordship over the nations and God’s faithfulness (*hesed*) of God to the nation of Israel (40). They chronicle the Israelites’ conquest of Canaan, the conquest of the land, the establishment of the monarchy with the rise of David as the ‘image-bearing vice-regent (1-2 Samuel), and the unraveling, destruction, and exile of the northern and southern kingdoms (1-2 Kings to Esther)’ (41). The same themes of creation, sin, and recreation in the Pentateuch are evident in the historical books (41). The prophets provide ‘theological commentary’ for the story that unfolds in the historical books (51). The prophets underscore the faithlessness of Israel to the covenant and the *hesed* of God to the covenant amid Israel’s failure. Despite the failure of Israel, the prophets speak to the hope of a new covenant that will enable through the internalisation of the covenant obedience to the covenant stipulations.

‘Holiness in the Wisdom Literature’ is the title of chapter three. In this chapter, Ayars does not deviate from the *hesed* and transcendent monotheism themes. The latter is, as he argues, the foundation for wisdom literature. According to the Proverbs, certain behaviours make sense for everyday living because they ‘fulfill the creation’s purpose to glorify God’ (71). Both Proverbs and Ecclesiastes emphasise that fulfilled human living begins by recognising that God is the transcendent creator and the role of humans in that regard. Job, the central character of the book bearing his name, attempts to reconcile his losses ‘with the existence of a sovereign and good God’ (74). Ayars summarises the point: ‘God is God and people are people. People cannot compare with God’ (75). The Psalms are a collection of songs of praise to God. Writers and singers acknowledge God’s transcendence. ‘Worship is the proper human response to the moral purity and ontological otherness of God’ (77). The Song of Songs underscores the covenant metaphor of the divine-human relationship, which is characterised by love (87).

Part Two “‘Be Perfect as your Heavenly Father is Perfect’: Holiness in the New Testament’ is authored principally by Dr Friedeman. In chapter 4, he raises the principal question: ‘*Can* we be holy?’ (95, emphasis in the original). Friedeman chooses two foci to limit the scope for this chapter on the Gospels and the Book of Acts: 1) holiness and the life of Jesus, and 2) holiness in the words of Jesus (95-96). In the former, the author uses principally Luke-Acts as a lens for understanding the theology of holiness in the five books as reflected in the life of Jesus, but in addressing the theology of holiness in the words of Jesus, he allows the other Gospel writers to speak. As the section ‘Holiness in the Words of Jesus’ unfolds, he focuses on three passages (one from each of the remaining Gospels): Matthew 5-7, the sermon on the mount; Mark 12:28-34, the greatest commandment; and John 17, Jesus’ high priestly prayer. In the conclusion, he poses the same question and summarises the chapter: ‘The Gospels and Acts

answer this question with a resounding, “Yes – through the work of Jesus and by the power of the Spirit” (121).

‘Holiness in the Letters of Paul’ is the title of chapter five. Friedeman wants to demonstrate that Paul depicts a ‘remarkably similar’ view of the Christian life as found in the Gospels and Acts, but he also wants to answer ‘some of the lingering practical and pastoral questions’ that were not addressed in the previous chapter (124). In this chapter, Friedeman selects an array of passages of scripture to demonstrate his theme: life in the Spirit (Gal. 5:13-26); God’s will for the sanctification of believers (1 Thessalonians); life in the Spirit, revisited (Rom. 6-8); and, not perfect yet perfected (Phil. 3:12-15). While some interpret Romans 7:14-25 rather flatly as depicting Paul held hostage in an internal struggle between good and evil, Friedeman interprets the passage contextually, including the broader Pauline corpus, and determines that it is not descriptive of ordinary Christian life. The chapter concludes that Paul holds that holiness is normative for the Christian life (145).

Of the remaining nine books of the New Testament, Friedeman chooses to discuss five in chapter six, entitled ‘Holiness in the General Epistles and Revelation’. Hebrews depicts Jesus as the pioneer of the path of perfection whom Christians should follow. Friedeman explores in the book of James the ideas of double-mindedness (Jas. 1:4; 4:1-10) and the two-tongued (Jas. 3:9-12) and concludes that neither is normative for the Christian life, but perfection (Jas. 1:4, 17, 25) is. First Peter depicts the new identity given to believers and ‘how they should live out this identity in their culture (1 Pet. 2:11-5:11)’ (158). First John reflects ‘an optimism of grace’ (167). Friedeman grapples with the typical way of understanding the pronouncements in 1 John 3:6 and 3:9 as the habitual use of the present tense and ultimately concludes that the two passages should be understood as ‘gnomic present’. He describes ‘gnomic present’ as ‘proverb-like pronouncements about the way things usually are’ (166) and concludes that ‘as a general rule, *God’s children do not commit willful sin*’ (167, emphasis in the original). In his comments on the book of Revelation, Friedeman explores ideas like the colour white as a symbol of purity, the new creation with echoes of Eden, the language of victorious believers, and the final glorious reality of the culmination of the new age. He summarises this part: ‘The doctrine of holiness, therefore, is not based on a small group of passages that use *holy* and related words. It is, rather, based on a vision of the Christian life that spans the entire New Testament’ (173).

Part 3 is entitled “‘Let Those of Us Who Are Perfect Think This Way’: Holiness in Christian History’. Dr Bounds chooses to use the lens of ‘perfect’ and ‘perfection’ in surveying the scope of the literature (177). A survey of the Apostolic Fathers reveals that perfection entails love and freedom from sin (178-179). The early Greek Fathers reveal a penchant for connecting ‘the image or likeness of God’ to perfection. While acknowledging that perfection is a mixed bag, Bounds concludes chapter 7, ‘Early Foundations for Holiness’, with a positive note that it ‘remains an expectation or possibility for every believer’ (206).

Chapter 8 is entitled ‘Holiness in the Middle Ages’. Bounds explores the idea of perfection in the Middle Ages and finds much common theological ground with the previous eras. He concludes that experiences of perfection were confined mainly to the monastics and mystics and were not considered attainable for normal Christians (232).

In chapter 9, Bounds explores ‘Holiness in the Premodern and Modern Era’. He covers early Protestantism, the Lutheran and Reformed traditions, Roman Catholics, Pietism, Anglicanism, Wesleyanism, Pentecostalism, and neo-Wesleyanism. He concludes, ‘These expressions of Christian perfection have roots in church history’ (266).

Part 4 is entitled “‘May the God of Peace Sanctify You Entirely’: A Theology of Holiness’. In ‘Holiness and Human Sin’, Bounds argues admirably that holiness and love are ‘foundational to a Wesleyan theology of human perfection’ (271). He explores three different models for understanding the image of God (272-273): 1) rational/creative/moral/affective; 2) relational; and, 3) vocational (reviewer’s summary). Bounds, then, asserts that Wesley’s three aspects of the *imago Dei* (as natural, moral, and political image) are compatible with the previous models; however, there is neither a clear explanation of this assertion nor of the assertion that Wesley’s trifold understanding of the image makes clear that ‘the first humans were created by God as *persons*’ (275). Bounds discusses hamartiology and the biblical language of sin. In a section titled ‘The ontology and phenomena of original sin’ (289), Bounds does not deliver on the promise of discussing the *ontology* of original sin. In this section, his discussion centres on ‘disordered love’, but he does not explain how such love is *ontological* (if it is). Bounds uses the first-person plural pronouns to such a degree that it may undermine the writers’ aim: ‘...we are incapable of aligning our will with God’s. No matter how hard we try, sin has dominion over our will’ (297). There are numerous recurrences of first-person pronouns throughout the chapter, and the lack of precision in the language frustrates a clear understanding. (Unfortunately, the same overuse continues in the following chapter, cf. p. 319.)

‘Holiness and Redemption’ is the title of chapter eleven. The first section of the chapter explores the role of the Trinity in making Christian perfection possible, including a helpful discussion on the role of the church. Bounds avoids prescribing a ‘neat and orderly’ *ordo salutis* in the following section but does outline a ‘general conceptual framework’ (311) in the next section, where he discusses many of the categories in a Wesleyan order of salvation.

The last chapter is entitled ‘The When and How of Holiness’. Bounds returns to an issue raised in the introduction and discusses in a more through-going manner the agenda of the authors to present a ‘middle way’ (334-341). The chapter/section is adapted from an article that Bounds had written previously (334, fn. 1). More adaptations should have been made, in this reviewer’s opinion, to place some of the divergent issues in the footnotes or an appendix rather than discussing them in the body of the text. For example, in the body of the text, he discusses his concerns about an article written by Allan Brown and a ‘possible interpretation’ of Article X of the Articles of Faith of the Church of the Nazarene. Airing the ‘dirty laundry’ of the holiness movement does not seem to coincide with the book’s purpose (as this reviewer understands it) to present a cogent argument for the biblical, classical, and consensual presentation of the doctrine of holiness. In addition, Bounds expresses several concerns with his perceived differences between Wesley’s perception of grace and the holiness tradition’s perceptions of the same (357). While acknowledging Bound’s concerns pertain to his argument for the ‘middle way’, the details could have been relegated to an appendix (or another forum) in favour of a more cohesive approach. The book’s conclusion (361-372) contains a brief catechism on the doctrine of holiness, some frequently asked questions, and advice to seekers of the experience of entire sanctification.

The discussion on the three major positions on Christian perfection in the Wesleyan tradition seems rather reductionistic, as if the concerns over the circumstance of Christian perfection are paramount or are the only tensions in the Wesleyan tradition on the theology of holiness. This reviewer would have preferred a more conciliatory approach dealing with some of the tensions as in the ‘both/and’ approach (in the spirit of Paul Wesley Chilcote’s *Recapturing the Wesleys’ Vision*). Furthermore, the ‘middle way’ is not consistently treated throughout the book; for example, the sections dealing with the biblical data do not address the ‘middle way’.

Overall, the book's two parts on the biblical foundations are well developed. The part on the Old Testament reads like a narrative whereas the part on the New Testament does not. Perhaps this issue is due more to the content of the two testaments than the differences in the two writers' approaches. However, these two parts do not significantly shape the theological discussion in part four, 'A Theology of Holiness'. One example is captured in the sentence, 'Holiness... is a matter of missional urgency' (1); it would have been beneficial for the authors to expound upon this idea, particularly because it was addressed in the Old Testament foundations section of the book.

The formatting of the headings is a bit confusing at times. The index could have been more exhaustive. Despite the reviewer's concerns, the book advances the discussion on holiness and is a welcome addition to this field of studies. As Africans read the book, they will value the biblical and historical contributions; however, Africans outside of the Wesleyan tradition may not be so impressed with the chapters dealing with some of the intricacies of the theology of holiness since they address concerns within a particular tradition and are shaped by discussions outside of the continent. Perhaps it is time for Africans to contribute to the subject of holiness from an African perspective.